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POSSIBLE SOVIET SATELLITIZATION OF SYRIA: TARGETS,
TECHNIQUES AND INDICATORS

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POSSIBLE SOVIET SATELLITIZATION OF SYRIA: TARGETS, TECHNIQUES AND INDICATORS

This paper suggests the targets and techniques that will most probably be employed by the Soviet Union in Syria in the event that the USSR plans to make that country a Soviet satellite. It is recognized that Soviet policy may seek to realize its objectives in Syria through a wide variety of tactics--including the overt diplomatic, military, propaganda and economic measures which have already proved effective--without creating a satellite regime. The problem considered here is that of determining whether such overt measures are supplemented by covert actions designed not merely to influence but actually to control the Syrian government and to bring about a form of "people's democracy."

I. Targets and Techniques

The Soviets cannot hope to establish a satellite regime in Syria patterned exactly on the East European regimes, which have these common characteristics:

1. They were established in the presence, or with the backing, of Soviet military force.
2. They are headed by indoctrinated Communists whose continuance in power is dictated by the Soviet leadership.
3. They subordinate their foreign and domestic policies and interests to the express requirements of the Soviet Union.

For the foreseeable future Syria will lack the first two of these satellite characteristics. The Red Army is not present

in force nor poised on a common frontier to compel establishment of a Communist-dominated regime. The Communist Party of Syria, although well-organized, is relatively small and contains few indoctrinated Communists and almost no Moscow-trained cadre.

Nevertheless, the satellitization of Syria is possible if a dictatorial regime can be established which, in exchange for Soviet military, economic and political support for its perpetuation, subordinates its foreign policy and certain domestic interests to Soviet direction and needs. As a suitable substitute for Red Army forces, such a regime would rest on indigenous military forces controlled by elements amenable to Soviet direction. It is doubtful that Soviet doctrinal scruples would be any serious obstacle to their temporary acceptance of a Syrian leadership not sharing their own ideological biases. By the same token, Arab chauvinism--an effective slogan for mobilizing street mobs--would presumably not be an ideological barrier to any foreseeable Syrian leadership group intent on gaining power. Thus, the prospectively subservient Syrian leadership would be motivated by sheer opportunism (and possibly by anti-Westernism) and would, if the expected pattern is followed, be made increasingly dependent on Soviet support for its continuation in power.

Soviet satellitization efforts in Syria will certainly take account of the very great differences existing between

Syria and the East European satellites in terms of social structure, economic resources and organization, communications media, and the traditions of government and political organization. Nevertheless, Soviet techniques will follow the same guiding principles as in Eastern Europe, which called for the seizure of physical, political, economic and ideological power centers and, where this was too difficult, the neutralization of anti-Communist and non-Communist centers of power.

A. Military and Security Police

The prime Soviet target will be the Army, the major locus of power in Syria. The Soviets will attempt to advance the careers of officers friendly to the USSR, while trying to eliminate or neutralize those holding anti-Soviet or pro-Western views. Through Chief of Staff General Bizri, the Russians are presumably already in a position to begin this process. The continued supply of Bloc arms will enhance the prestige of pro-Soviet Army elements, who can claim a share of credit for a buildup which undoubtedly appeals to all professional elements. Once completely Soviet-equipped, the Army will be dependent on the USSR for replacements and spare parts, and the threat to cut off supplies can be used if necessary to keep the pro-Soviet officers in line.

The Soviets probably will also work to effect the assignment of Soviet or Bloc advisors to command and staff positions

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in the Army as well as the Defense Ministry to serve as a channel for orders from Moscow and to supervise compliance therewith. This step could be facilitated by obtaining Syrian acceptance of an official Soviet military mission.

The Soviets also will have to deal with that Army faction which, while not objecting to a pro-Soviet, anti-Western orientation, is imbued with Nasirism and looks to Cairo rather than Moscow for guidance and leadership. Soviet attempts to neutralize and ultimately eliminate this faction can be expected. Colonel Sarraj, the Army G-2, who is said to head this group, controls the counterintelligence service and, reportedly, the security police. He thus holds a power position which, in the case of every East European satellite, was a Communist target of first priority. Removal of Sarraj from his key post and his replacement by a member of the Bizri faction would mark a significant stage in the satellitization of Syria.

B. Political

In the political field the Soviets, for the reasons already stated, will not rely primarily on a direct buildup of the Syrian Communist Party (CPS). The classic Communist technique, successfully executed in the East European satellites and attempted, for instance, in Austria, is to press for a united front of the left whose program, in the early stages, reflects unexceptionable national aspirations. The sequel is the

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penetration of key positions in the front and, through it, of the government, and then the gradual neutralization of non-Communist elements and the emergence of a Communist-controlled leftist party. In the arsenal of weapons used to destroy the non-Communist left in Eastern Europe were blackmail, arrests on trumped-up charges, bribery and other inducements to personal advancement, administrative sabotage of ministries not controlled by Communists, character assassination and, where necessary, physical assassination.

In Eastern Europe, the social democratic parties, which commanded the loyalty of most industrial workers, were the preferred targets in relation to which the Communists, in their own words, "played the part of the pike in the carp pool." The logical target for penetration in Syria appears to be the Arab Social Resurrection Party (ASRP), not only because it is leftist, but because it is the most influential. The emergence in its leadership of markedly pro-Soviet, as distinct from simply pro-Arab or anti-Western figures, would suggest serious Communist takeover plans, as would an ASRP coalition with leftist elements dominated by Khalid Bakdash, Syria's leading Communist.

The Soviets probably will attempt to place agents (advisors, technicians, etc.) in positions where they will be able to influence policy in a pro-Soviet direction and to assist the rise of pro-Soviet elements and the dismissal or neutralization

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of hostile personnel. The nature of these "advisory" positions and the degree to which their existence is admitted, would probably depend on the extent to which satellitization had progressed.

C. Communications and Propaganda Media

As a necessary accompaniment to seizure of political power, the Communists seek effective control of communications media and the instruments of propaganda. In the postwar national front governments of Eastern Europe, the Communists sought to install a Party member as minister of information, culture, or public enlightenment, by whatever name this key post was called. By discriminatory allocation of newsprint, distribution of government printing, patronage, censorship of opposition news organs as Fascist or otherwise subversive of the "democratic" order, and by similar techniques, the controlled ministry gradually shut off all except Communist-approved information.

In Syria, where the Communists are not strong enough to claim official supervision of communications media, Soviet methods will necessarily be more indirect. Techniques to be anticipated include covert subsidization and control of news media; concealed Soviet payments to influential and ostensibly independent journalists; expense-paid trips to Moscow for writers, educators and other members of the intelligentsia who, under the guise of "cultural exchange" will be subject to

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Soviet persuasive efforts of various kinds, if not actual indoctrination; and the emergence of new media sponsored by Communist front groups. The Soviets also may be expected to promote increasingly centralized and stringent official control and censorship of information against the time when they can gain effective control of the propaganda apparatus by infiltration.

Soviet political action and propaganda in the preparatory stages of a takeover will be geared to Arab nationalism, the appeal to a united front against Western imperialism, and continued identification of the USSR with anti-Israeli policy and sentiment--sine qua non of effective action in Syria. Anti-Soviet elements will be smeared as corrupt tools of Western interests. Initially and until such time as a Bakdash is given an influential position, public adherence to Soviet theoretical terminology (which in Eastern Europe persistently identified the concept of patriotism with the Soviet slogan "proletarian internationalism") should not be expected. However, the propaganda of such ideological slogans could be taken as evidence of an advanced stage of satellitization.

D. Economic

Soviet economic influence in Syria will be extended as a lever for exerting political pressure. Trade relations will be increased by price and credit policies favorable, at the

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outset, to Syria, with the objective of increasing to a critical degree Syrian dependence on the Bloc market and Bloc imports. Special attention will be given to Soviet Bloc participation in Syrian development schemes, both through low bids on construction contracts--as in the case of the refinery which the Czechs are now building--and through the extension of long-term credit. An influx of Bloc technicians to staff these development projects can be anticipated, while dependence on continued Soviet credit for completion of ambitious and well-advertised development programs will guarantee the pro-Soviet orientation of government officials whose political careers will be increasingly tied to the success of these much-publicized economic plans.

As a subsidiary goal the Soviets may encourage the establishment of trading and shipping firms with exclusive rights to conclude trade deals and shipments involving Bloc goods destined either for Syria or for transhipment through Syria. In Austria, France and Italy such Communist cover firms have customarily been used for economic penetration, as auxiliary intelligence nets, and to provide financial support to the local Communist Party.

E. Mass Organizations

Simultaneous with these operations to gain effective control of military, economic, political, communications and security strong points, Soviet plans for the satellitization

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of Syria would call for control and buildup of the potent force represented by "the street." Leftists subservient to the USSR will penetrate labor unions and student organizations which will be utilized not only as propaganda sounding boards but as rallying points for demonstrations and riots, the mere threat of which will serve to pressure politicians who are recalcitrant about following the Soviet line.

Along with penetration of existing organizations will go the creation of new front groups aimed at channeling the aspirations and frustrations of important economic and social elements. As in East Europe the intellectuals will be courted for this purpose and organized into "patriotic writers' and artists' associations" or similar groups, with liberal subsidization.

The large, feudalistic landholdings and the traditional tribal leadership pattern are distinctive Middle East institutions which should be Soviet targets of some importance. Any organizations of peasants or tribesmen pressing for alteration of these institutions, however innocuous they may be in name or proclaimed purpose, will warrant careful scrutiny as possible Communist fronts.

F. Religion

With respect to religion, Communist tactics in Eastern Europe aimed at the neutralization rather than liquidation of the churches, especially the Catholic Church with its many

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adherents among the masses. Church leaders who became symbols of anti-Communist resistance--Mindszenty in Hungary, Stepinac in Yugoslavia, Wyszinski in Poland--were arrested, tried and imprisoned, and the Communist regimes found a modus vivendi with their successors. Islamic opposition, to the extent that it exists in Syria, will probably be combatted by less drastic measures, including subversion of individual leaders and a propaganda drive stressing the progress and freedom of Muslims in the USSR. Efforts along the same line will be made among Christian elements. A special effort can be expected to subordinate the Syrian Orthodox Church to the Russian Orthodox Patriarch in Moscow and the Armenian Apostolic Church to the Catholicos in Yerevan.

G. Culture

Cultural exchanges, the provision of cheap books and other pro-Soviet literature may be regarded as a normal extension of present-day diplomacy. However, a disproportionately large concentration of such overt propaganda efforts on Syria may indicate that the USSR is seriously attempting to create a climate of opinion in which takeover operations could proceed with maximum speed and efficiency.

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II. Indicators

Information on the following subjects is required to indicate a Soviet objective of satellitizing Syria and to estimate the extent to which this objective is succeeding. Detailed requirements under each subject are preceded by one or more "key indicators" which, it is believed, should receive priority attention.

A. Military

Key Indicator: Removal of Colonel Sarraj, Army G-2, from his position in control of counterintelligence and security police.

1. Key Officers and/or Officer Groups
 - a. Identity, political sentiments and rivalries.
 - b. Indications of connections with Communists, (CPS or Bloc Embassy personnel).
 - c. Indications of receipt of funds (bribes, subversion expenses) from pro-Soviet sources.
2. Transfers
 - a. Identity and sentiments of officers involved.
 - b. Are new posts more influential or less?
 - c. Announced reasons for transfers? Actual reasons?
 - d. Do transfers affect power status of pro-Soviet groups?

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- e. Who is responsible for transfers?
- f. Is political pressure involved? If so, by whom?

3. Retirements and Dismissals

- a. Same as for Section A2, mutatis mutandis.
- b. Are retired officers of normal retirement age?
Eligible by reason of disability?

4. Nasirism

- a. Extent of Nasir's influence among Syrian officers.
- b. Indications of pro-Nasir clique cooperation with, or hostility to, pro-Soviet group.
- c. Indications of attempts to eliminate or downgrade pro-Nasir officers.

5. Soviet Advisors and Technicians

- a. Number, identity, duties and type of Soviet Bloc advisors and technicians.
- b. Level at which advisors operate.
- c. Do advisors actually have command functions? If so,
 - (1) How are orders transmitted?
 - (2) Is Army as a whole aware of source of these orders?
- d. Attitudes of Syrian officers toward Soviet Bloc advisors? toward technicians?
- e. Evidence of indoctrination.
 - (1) Of Syrians by Soviet Bloc advisors and technicians in Syria.

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- (2) Of Syrian personnel sent to Bloc countries
for training.

6. Ministry of Defense

- a. Are there Soviet Bloc advisors in Ministry?
- b. If so, nature and extent of their duties, influence and authority.
 - (1) Relationship to Syrian political officials.
 - (2) Indications that Ministry officials from Minister and below take orders from Soviets.

7. Soviet Bloc Arms

- a. Attitude of Syrian officers toward Soviet Bloc arms.
- b. Evidence of trend toward pro-Soviet attitudes and policies to ensure continued deliveries.

B. Political

Key Indicators:

- (1) Governmental changes which result in the elevation of known pro-Soviet officials to power positions, especially to posts offering effective control of defense, propaganda and economic development.
- (2) Communist penetration of the ASRP, or any coalition of the ASRP with leftist elements dominated by Khalid Bakdash.

1. Pro-Soviet politicians.

- a. Names and positions.

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- b. Evidence of acceptance of Soviet funds.
 - c. Contacts with CPS or Soviet Bloc Embassy personnel.
 - d. Do they consciously carry out pro-Soviet policies as distinct from anti-Western ones?
 - e. Evidence that they take orders from Soviets.
 - f. Do they propagandize on behalf of Soviets? Of a one-party system? Against anti-Soviet elements and/or publications?
2. Government
- a. Evidence of deliberate appointments of pro-Soviet individuals to responsible positions.
 - b. Evidence of deliberate elimination of anti-Soviet or pro-Western officials.
 - c. Presence of Soviet Bloc advisors in ministries. If so,
 - (1) What ministries are involved?
 - (2) Numbers, names and duties of such advisors.
 - (3) Extent of authority.
 - (a) Can and do they influence policy?
 - (b) How do they exert authority?
 - (4) Who (individuals, parties, Army) is responsible for their presence?
 - d. Relationship, if any, between government officials and pro-Soviet Army elements.
 - e. Evidence of Soviet bribery.

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- f. Police and justice officials.
 - (1) Political orientation of officials.
 - (2) Evidence of infiltration by Communists or pro-Soviet leftists.
 - (3) Do officials countenance or cover-up illegal activities of Communists or pro-Soviet elements?
 - (4) Do officials deliberately persecute anti-Soviet and/or pro-Western activities?

3. Parties

- a. Which are pro-Soviet?
 - (1) Are they gaining in influence?
 - (2) Extent of governmental positions held by their members.
 - (3) Evidence of infiltration by actual Communists.
 - (4) Extent of opportunistic traits of leaders.
 - (5) Evidence of Soviet Bloc subsidization.
- b. Propaganda for National or United Front.
- c. Evidence of contacts or links between parties and CPS or Soviet Bloc Embassies.
- d. Evidence of attempts to eliminate or neutralize anti-Soviet and/or pro-Western elements in existing parties.
- e. Evidence of attempts to eliminate anti-Soviet and/or pro-Western parties, or the leaders of such parties.

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4. Elections

- a. Attempts to discredit democratic electoral procedures.
- b. Pressures or fraud to elect pro-Soviet individuals?
To prevent election of anti-Soviet and/or pro-Western individuals.
- c. Attempts by Communists to campaign under standard of other parties.
- d. Nature of election campaign propaganda.
 - (1) Openly pro-Soviet?
 - (2) Emphasis on anti-Westernism?

5. Tribes

- a. Propaganda to disrupt traditional leadership pattern.
 - (1) Source of such propaganda.
 - (2) Evidence of Soviet activity in these fields.
 - (3) Nature of alternative advocated.
- b. Soviet propaganda among Kurds.
 - (1) Nature and source.
 - (2) Role of CPS Chief, Khalid Bakdash.

C. Communications and Propaganda Media

Key Indicator: A markedly increased adherence to the Soviet line in Damascus radio broadcasts and in the press, especially in organs traditionally independent of Soviet influence. (This can be established by systematic content analysis.)

1. Evidence of Soviet penetration or subversion.
 - a. Extent of local pro-Soviet press.

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- b. Purchase of existing publications, or founding of new ones, by Soviets or pro-Soviet elements.
 - c. Purchase of pro-Soviet space; bribes to journalists.
2. Controlled Press
- a. Evidence of campaign by pro-Soviet groups for a controlled press.
 - b. Discrimination against anti-Soviet press.
 - (1) Police persecution
 - (2) Denial of newsprint
 - (3) Intimidation of staff

D. Economic

Key Indicators:

- (1) Effective Soviet penetration of the economy through trade pacts, development projects or investment.
- (2) Establishment of trading firms controlled by Communists or other Soviet-directed elements handling exclusively trade with the Soviet orbit.

1. Trade

- a. Evidence of Soviet offers of exceptionally high prices for Syrian goods; of offers of Soviet Bloc goods at exceptionally low prices.
- b. Soviet provisions of unusually favorable credit terms and facilities.
- c. Evidence of government emphasis on favorable nature of increased Soviet Bloc-Syrian trade; of government attempts to orient an increasingly large percentage of trade towards Bloc.

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- d. Evidence of Soviet Bloc purchases of control of key Syrian industries or firms.

2. Development

- a. Evidence of below-cost bids by Soviet Bloc on projects.
- b. Soviet provision of unusually favorable credit terms.
- c. Influx of Bloc technicians to build projects.
 - (1) Do they try to influence Syrians?
 - (2) Discrimination against anti-Soviets in hiring and local expenditures.
- d. Evidence of undue pressure to award contracts to Bloc.

E. Mass Organizations

Key Indicator: Apparent increases in the membership and financial strength of student and labor organizations, and the staging of street demonstrations by these groups obviously timed to influence governmental action in a pro-Soviet direction.

1. Labor

- a. Communist or pro-Soviet control of unions.
- b. Evidence of infiltration by those elements.
- c. Soviet subsidization of unions; bribery of union officials.
- d. Political strikes to foster pro-Soviet objectives.

2. Other Organizations (Student, Women, Peasants, Professional)

- a. Extent and nature of Communist and/or pro-Soviet control or infiltration.

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- b. Front groups now existing; formation of new ones.
 - (1) Political orientation of principal members.
 - (2) Influence in country? In Army and other parties?
 - (3) Size and source of funds.

F. Religion

Key Indicators:

- (1) Espousal by influential religious leaders of proposals to fuse Syrian and Russian ecclesiastical jurisdictions.
- (2) Propaganda stressing the progress and freedom of Muslims in the USSR.

1. Muslims

- a. Subversion of Muslim leaders.
- b. Attempts to convince Syrians of good treatment by USSR of Soviet Muslims.

2. Orthodox

- a. Attempts to infiltrate Orthodox Church.
- b. Attempts to persuade Orthodox Church to affiliate with Moscow.
- c. Evidence of subsidization of Church or bribery of individual priests by Soviets.

3. Armenian

- a. Same as E2, mutatis mutandis.
- b. Evidence of Soviet propaganda to emphasize relationship with Armenian SSR.

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G. Culture

Key Indicators:

- (1) Leftist orientation of Syrian delegates to Bloc countries before and especially after their sojourn in the Soviet Union.
- (2) Disproportionate concentration of Soviet cultural efforts on Syria.
 - 1. Soviet delegations to Syria.
 - 2. Syrian delegations to Soviet Bloc countries.
 - a. Political orientation of delegation's members.
 - b. Evidence of indoctrination attempts, (successful or not) during trips.
 - c. Source of expense funds.

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